



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

SYBIL BRAND COMMISSION FOR INSTITUTIONAL INSPECTIONS

Room 372, Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration
500 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012
(213) 974-1465 or (213) 974-1431
Website: <http://sbc.lacounty.gov>

FOUNDER
Mrs. Sybil Brand

CHAIRPERSON
Mrs. Eleanor R. Montañó

Mr. Donald S. Andrews
Ms. Johanna Arias-Bhatia
Ms. Barbara Bigby
Ms. Susan Burton
Mr. Percy Duran III
Ms. Keren M. Goldberg
Ms. Cheryl Grills, Ph.D.
Ms. Anne Hill
Ms. Theresa Zhen

September XX, 2015

The Honorable Board of Supervisors
County of Los Angeles
500 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Supervisors:

At its recent meeting, the Sybil Brand Commission (SBC) requested the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (SD), to provide information regarding the Inmate Welfare Fund (IWF). Subsequently, a representative from the SD attended the Commission's meeting and presented the IWF Expenditure and Revenue Summary Report for Fiscal Year 2014-15.

We have attached the report for your review and comment. Given that the total of this IWF is almost \$24 million, there may be many questions about how these funds are used and distributed. As it relates to the expenditure it seems it may be important to do a comprehensive audit to see why \$289,061 is being spent on newspapers and also find out who is receiving these papers. Other questions may arise by asking for a breakdown of the items that cost \$13,856,000, or what is contained in the "Inmate Indigent Kits" costing \$182,762.

Inmate Welfare Fund is generated through inmate commissary, vending, and telephone contracts. The SBC Commissioners are concerned about the excessive charges to the inmates without great benefit. For instance, the inmates generate \$15,000,000 in revenue from making phone calls and \$893,368 from purchases from the vending machines. Shouldn't the inmates receive more benefit such as vocational counseling and training from these funds?

The Inmate Welfare Fund is a perfect example of how Los Angeles is balancing its budget on the backs of the poor. Prisoners are disproportionately low-income, unemployed, and resource constrained. Yet as this IWF report makes clear, they are

The Honorable Board of Supervisors
September XX, 2015
Page 2

charged and assessed fees for the County that are later earmarked as revenue for the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. Through revenues gained from inmates in the form of telephone fees, vending sales, and merchandise produced by inmate labor, the Sheriff's Department has generated nearly \$25 million for its own use and expenditures. Much of this goes towards expenditures like officer salaries, which typically would come out of the Sheriff's General Fund.

By erecting and maintaining a system where inmates fund the projects of the Sheriff's Department, the County creates perverse incentives to charge inmates more and penalize those inmates who cannot afford to pay. In this way, the Sheriff's Department is complicit in perpetuating a cycle of poverty among those incarcerated in County detention facilities

The SD Inmate Welfare Commission is responsible for the oversight of the IWF. The members of the Commission are private citizens appointed by the Sheriff. The Commission is an informal body established without ordinance or the Board of Supervisors' resolution to act in an advisory capacity to the Sheriff, hence the Commission's control over the IWF is delivered solely from the delegation of the Sheriff's authority.

The SBC hopes the Supervisors will respond to this alarming policy and recommends the following action to your honorable Board:

- Request a comprehensive audit of the Sheriff's Department IWF
- Consider appointing one of SBC Commissioners to serve on the IWF Commission as an ex-officio member.

Thank you for considering our recommendations. If you have any questions or need additional information, please let us know.

Sincerely,

Eleanor R. Montaña
Chair, Sybil Brand Commission

EM:bf

Attachment